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INDIVIDUAL AND COLLECTIVE CHARACTERISTICS IN FOLK-LORE.

ACCORDING to the indication of the name, a folk-song or folk-tale seems to be contrasted with the composition of a single artist. "Popular" literature, as we conceive, belongs or belonged to the community, while a work of art is the property of an individual. The former is marked by simplicity and uniformity, the latter by complication and variety. The one makes an effect of unconsciousness and *naïveté*, the latter of reflection and deliberate choice. In this respect, the simile of wild and cultivated flora appears to express a real distinction; as every bloom of the woods is felt to be pretty, so every traditional product has its æsthetic value; while literary constructions must be perfect, or else are cast out as unregarded weeds. The phraseology which would put down the folk-song as a growth of nature, the written poem as a creation of art, has therefore some real basis in the impression respectively made by the two sorts of composition.

At the time when folk-tales first began to attract attention, this opposition was especially marked. The sophisticated character of eighteenth century literature, its rationality and precision, common-sense and absence of mysticism, exhibited the reverse of qualities possessed by Christian legends still current in Europe, or northern ballads made familiar by Percy. At a later time, only in the first quarter of the nineteenth century, the collections of the brothers Grimm called the attention of literati to the existence of a treasure hitherto disregarded, to nursery tales or *märchen* recited by nurses and mothers, and to the numerous narratives remembered in Germany, in which the activity of saints or fairies was associated with particular localities.

By Jacob Grimm himself, and by the school which he founded, the explanation given to the entirety of this German traditional literature was that it represented the survival of ancient German religion. Man, it was thought, had from the first possessed a pure religious

feeling and ethical sense; in the main, his pristine worship might be regarded as a system of conceptions founded on a direct reaction to nature. The phenomena of the external world, interpreted as the expression of divine purpose, by a regular descent reflected themselves in mythology; actions of gods passed into narratives of heroes, these into the fireside tales of the modern world; folk-song and folk-tale were to be considered as the detritus of myth. It was believed that such body of traditions formed the peculiar possession of a single people, transmitted without serious admixture from generation to generation, and expressing the peculiar mentality of the race to which it belonged.

To the English public, F. Max Müller became the interpreter of such conceptions, and through his presentation the theory of the solar myth for a brief period reigned in current literature. Such explanation was connected with the habit of view, according to which primitive methods of thought and expression radically differed from those of recent time. Men, this author supposed, had once possessed a language-making faculty, in virtue of which an external stimulus produced its effect in sound; a word was the echo of the organism to such impulse. In this manner, in early ages, were formed roots of language; at a later day, when no longer needed, the faculty became atrophied. Similarly with legend; there had been a myth-making age, in which thanks in part to the condition imposed by language, numerous histories had arisen respecting divine beings; after such mental stock had been supplied, followed a period of reflection and combination. Aryan folk-lore, according to this theory, constituted an inheritance from the remote Aryan past; each branch of the Aryan family retained and modified traditions, which would express the mental qualities of each special people.

The sudden ruin of this hypothesis was owing in part to more exact knowledge, but in part also to the presumptions derived from other fields of study. Cataclysmic explanations of creation came to be discredited; the belief gained ground that natural laws had not varied, and that the same causes formerly at work were working to-day.

In opposition to Müller, it was argued that language required no "rhematic" or word-making period; forces now active were sufficient to have produced the linguistic outfit. So in regard to myth; it was more in accord with scientific tendencies to assume that there never had been a time in which the organism corresponded more directly than at present to natural influences, or that mankind had ever possessed a direct and simple relation to nature. Far from supposing an ancient mythopœic age, investigators were more inclined to assume that the myth-making faculty is as existent now as in

any former period, however much the increasing habit of reflection, the veto of a larger experience, may negative inclinations in this direction.

The prejudice against the Aryan theory, arising from the desire to bring theories of human history into accord with general scientific conceptions, was confirmed by special investigations. Research could not proceed far without the discovery that the material of folk-lore was European rather than national; in particular, it came to be known that the *märchen* of Grimm, save in language, were scarce more German than they were English, French, Spanish, or Italian. In place of hereditary transmission from a remote past, began with more and more confidence to be asserted the view of relatively recent borrowing. In this manner, the attractive doctrine which had set down popular traditions as the voices of the different peoples fell into total ruin; it came to be perceived, that instead of being peculiarly the expression of national characteristics, traditional literature is a racial product than is written literature.

Benfey had argued that the real source of European folk-tales was to be found in collections of Oriental tales which through written record had become popular in Europe, and which, as he thought, had given birth to a vast body of western prose and verse. In this discussion, the weak point was the very slender relation of the Occidental narratives to those from which they were held to have been borrowed. In 1886, the learning of E. Cosquin gave more weight to the theory, by taking into account the great body of oral folk-lore; proving beyond a doubt the identity of many European and Asiatic *märchen*, he supposed the former borrowed from the latter, ultimately from India. In his examination of English ballads, Francis James Child showed that these, as a rule, belonged not to a national, but to a West-European vine. This knowledge, however, found slow acceptance in England. In 1891, when the author of this article attended the Second International Folk-Lore Conference, it was still generally held by English students of folk-lore that popular traditions were local and racial, and had descended from a prehistoric national past; the resemblance of narratives and beliefs found in different countries might arise, it was still thought, from that independent origination which implies only the like action of the human mind. On the other hand, in the example of a single tale, the most widely diffused of all human compositions, the writer pointed out that in England, Ireland, France, Germany, Russia, and Cashmere, in the "Arabian Nights" and in Buddhist scripture, the story of the bird-wife has entered as a whole; that in all cases its outline and the course of its modifications could be traced, and that it must be regarded as having migrated by way of translation, in the same man-

ner as the "Pilgrim's Progress" or "Robinson Crusoe" might migrate. For the process of such dissemination I proposed a rule, namely, that in folk-lore as in civilization diffusion takes place from the higher culture to the lower; whenever two races are in culture-contact, the more civilized, itself comparatively unaffected, bestows on its neighbor the entirety of its ideas and traditions. The valve is open in the flow from information from the superior to the inferior, but (with rare exceptions) closed in the inverse direction. This principle, not yet generally adopted, appears to me to furnish a safe canon of guidance, of which too much cannot be made.¹

Within the past decade, the hypothesis of diffusion has won a final victory, and so far as Europe is concerned is not now questioned. American studies seem to establish the same relation, inasmuch as they show that particular tales have wandered from one end of the continent to the other; while the rapid modification of aboriginal traditions under the influence of contact with civilized persons, the speedy absorption of European folk-lore, furnishes the most striking example of the law, according to which a superior neighbor remodels the ideas of an inferior with whom it comes into touch.

The most interesting effect of this change of view is the different attitude which it inspires toward racial tendencies and acquirements. Instead of a closed race, handing down from generation to generation its own stock of ideas and beliefs, we are offered only a stock of opinions and traditions common to a whole continent, migrating with disregard of the barriers offered by descent or language, perpetually becoming differentiated into new forms, which in their turn spread from centres of culture, varying with all degrees of rapidity,

¹ *The International Folk-Lore Congress, 1891. Papers and Transactions.* London, 1892, p. 64. The class of folk-tales considered is that of narratives which have found acceptance in many countries, and the metaphor used for illustration is that of a species of vegetable which has originated in a remote civilization, and has differentiated itself into new varieties, possessing certain advantages, which in the course of commercial intercourse are carried into distant regions, and may even supersede the original plant in its first habitat. That there can be any such thing as a theory of folk-tales in general I have always expressly denied. See a paper on the "Theory of Diffusion of Folk-tales" (vol. vii, p. 14). Professor Gummere is therefore wrong when for the second time, not having noticed my correction (vol. x, p. 337), he ascribes to me the doctrine which makes "the folk-tale a degenerate form, in low levels of culture, of something composed on higher levels." (*Beginnings of Poetry*, p. 179.) To point out the various inaccuracies of the statement would require space not at my disposal; I have never said or imagined that folk-tales are found only in low conditions of culture, or that they were composed amid a higher culture than that in which they have been collected. What is true and demonstrable is that Norse folk-tales, for example, take on wilder forms as a result of transmission to Lapps, while on the lips of American Indians European *märchen* absorb aboriginal elements.

now in a few years so establishing themselves in a new region as to supplant the ancient flora, now, with obstinate conservatism, maintaining themselves without essential change for two millenniums. The phenomena of traditionology, if the term may be allowed, have therefore some resemblance to those of botany.

In examining the problem of diffusion from country to country, we are only contemplating, on a magnified scale, that of diffusion from individual to individual. A particular European tale, as we have seen, is likely not to be autochthonous, but to have migrated into the country where we find it established; it belongs not to Germany or England alone, but to many lands; tracing back its history, we should find, if the evidence were adequate, one locality, European or Asiatic, from which it had been borrowed. The same process would apply to the different districts of the original country, to cantons of the district, and families of the canton. In the end, the tale, though now world-wide, would be found to have proceeded from the mind of one narrator, whose mentality it would originally have represented.

We may now ask, in how far is this single authorship consistent with the possession of those collective characteristics which are attributed to folk-lore? Reflection points out that these qualities, so far as they really exist, are perfectly consistent with ultimate reference to individual minds.

In the first place, too much importance cannot be assigned to the most salient property of folk-lore, namely, its communication by word of mouth. In the case of a written document, the original remains; if imitators modify the composition, it may still be possible, by recourse to the original, to determine the method of development and degree of deviation. For a folk-tale there is no such record; the tale has its life only in the memory of each reciter, who may remodel at pleasure. Growth therefore proceeds with entire freedom; the organism adapts itself to new conditions, migrates and settles with the ease of a weed. As with a word of the language, so with traditional history, — the alteration may be complete; we can only say that the first reciter was the author, in the same sense as we may say that this or that rill is the source of a river. The presumptive inventor himself formed the tale only by a re-arrangement of preëxisting elements; and it is generally a mere matter of convenience to determine whether a particular tale or ballad is to be considered as a new creation or as a variant of an older type; the extent to which we are ready to assume varieties is dependent on the closeness of observation which we choose to allow, and the number of pages available for description. It will therefore be permissible to refer the *märchen* to any one of its hundred authors, or to set it

down, without precise question, as the property of the community in which it is current.

The manner of transmission affects also the quality of the tale. The author who is obliged to depend on the memory of his auditors for the permanence of his production must deal sparingly in personal peculiarities. Suppose that his composition varies in a striking manner from the accepted model ; one or two repetitions, on the lips of narrators indifferent to anything more than the main action, will assimilate its language to the type of familiar stories. No extreme deviations from accepted belief or usual emotion are likely to endure. In this manner, the tendency of unwritten literature will be toward the average ; the tale will represent, not the opinions of this or that thinker, but the mental state of a community. It may then well be spoken of as belonging to the folk as a whole, rather than to the Peter or Thomas who may have ushered it into the world.

A third reason for the non-individual quality of folk-lore may be found in its antiquity. The particular narration may not be very old, but the ideas of which it is compounded are those which animate the uncultured part of the community, and therefore in essence belong to a time long past. The tale will therefore partake of the character of antiquity in showing simple conditions of thought. In the cultivated part of society, differentiation goes on with speed ; new senses, so to speak, are continually becoming active ; in place of colors, shades become objects of perception ; corresponding to increased specialization of functions, individual ways of feeling become more prominent, and find expression in literature. On the other hand, folk-lore will maintain the relative simplicity of the classes among which it is chiefly preserved ; left to the conservatism of the people, it will be little affected by the continual changes of fashion that affect literature. From the lips of the folk it will take that naïve quality which depends on simplicity and isolation from the great world. To the educated hearer, therefore, the oral song or speech will appear more or less uniform ; differences between one composition and another will be imperceptible, since the material lacks the vivid contrasts and accentuation of personal peculiarities to which he is accustomed in literature.

Without in any way taking from individual authorship, the qualities mentioned, in the main belonging to oral as distinguished from written literature, sufficiently explain the impression produced by the former as collective rather than personal, and as spontaneous rather than artistic.

When, however, we suppose that because all ballads or tales seem to us on the same level they made a similar impression on their first hearers, we are overhasty. To the ordinary white man all negroes

or Chinese appear to resemble one another. There is no reason to doubt that the innovations of a particular reciter would appear to his audience original; nor is it to be supposed that every folk-tale corresponded to the ideas of all the folk who listened to it, any more than is the case with literary productions.¹ On the contrary, we should find that each sect, each neighborhood, had its distinctive folk-lore, and that each narrator added to the story something of his personality.

Granted that folk-tales are collective only in the sense explained, it may further be asked whether the process of imagination by which they were constructed differed in any assignable respect from that usual in letters. Various such criteria might be presupposed; the folk-artist, it may be guessed, would be more objective and less reflective, might deal more in action and less in ethics, might be more spontaneous and less meditative. Again, folk-lore might be more sterile, less capable of variation, than literature, which, like a trailing vine, occupies every gap through which sunlight may be obtained, and perpetually seeks a free atmosphere.

For the examination of such questions we have now a considerable body of comparative material, which enables stories and verses to be followed from age to age, and allows their life-history to be charted. In this Journal I have recently offered such discussions in the case of a branch of the "Tale of the Three Wishes" and in a very familiar nursery rhyme. The result of these inquiries is decidedly adverse to the distinctions proposed. The folk-tales, it is perceived, vary with even greater freedom than do written productions; they differentiate themselves into every possible form, and such adaptation seems to be the result of the activity on the part of authors who aimed at attaining the greatest possible measure of novelty. The makers who depend on oral communication are no less original than the makers of folk-books; in neither case is there any such thing as unconsciousness, or any other process than that with which we are familiar in literature.²

Thus, in the "Tale of the Three Wishes," when the period had passed in which a visitor, as outside the kin, must be an enemy, when trade and barter came to be regarded as sources of wealth, it became desirable to protect the stranger within the gates. This was accomplished by appeals to the religious feeling. The stranger, for

¹ The English public which assimilated the nursery tales of Perrault and Grimm did not suppose that the tales were true, or continue to believe in the transformations and other features of savage belief which these exhibit; they simply accepted the narratives as agreeable tales, and so for millenniums have their ancestors proceeded in the reception of myths.

² Vol. xvii (1904), 59; xviii (1905), 33 ff.

all that his host knew, might be divine ; he might be a god of the region, who had undertaken to traverse the earth, in order that with his own eyes he might inspect the proceedings of his mortal subjects. This method of conception was carried out by innumerable tales, which with infinite variation have continued from prehistoric time to wander through Europe and Asia. These exhibit the close relations of oral and written literature ; now ascending into the literary sphere and hence once more descending to oral narrations, with no essential distinction of character they reappear as modern folk-books. In the process of continual change the histories assume all imaginable forms ; every opportunity for originality is eagerly accepted ; alike in its fertility and in its power of development, the oral productions are similar to the written.

In this case, also, the oral folk-tale had one difference resulting from the method of communication ; the reciter was dependent on his memory, which might be imperfect, and oftentimes alterations in a given theme are due to no other cause than such forgetfulness ; in filling the void by the aid of the other material with which his memory was stored, the narrator proceeded in the same manner as he would have done had he composed pen in hand.

The conclusion seems to be, that with respect to methods of authorship, folk-lore and literature present no salient differences other than those arising from the manner of record.

In respect to poetry, however, this doctrine has been denied by a learned student of literature ; in a work on "The Beginnings of Poetry," Prof. F. B. Gummere has argued that verse is "communal" in origin.¹ In this inquiry it is above all necessary to discriminate with clearness. What novelty has the definition ? What does the term "communal" include, beyond those collective characteristics above allowed, and which have universally been conceded to folk-song ?

The additions which make the originality of the thesis consist in the union of two notions, spontaneity and concurrence. Song, according to this idea, is originally an immediate creation, arising from the response to an emotional impulse ; once more, such creation arises in the dance, as a result of "communal" excitement, and is to be conceived as more or less coincident in the entire dancing group. Provision being thus made for starting the poetical process, what remains is the reaction of individual minds on the common material, which by degrees so completely transforms song that poetry, which in the first instance was the common property of a throng, and had its birth only in a mass, comes in the end to bear exclusively the individual stamp, and to be dependent on solitary

¹ *The Beginnings of Poetry*, New York, 1901.

inspiration. The working out of these contrasts, this "curve of evolution," Professor Gummere conceives (if I correctly interpret his mystical doctrine) to be exhibited in the history of literature.

In the first place, it must be remarked with respect to this theory that it has suspiciously the character of those outgrown hypotheses which Max Müller for a time made so famous. As the latter presented us with a myth-making age, so Professor Gummere with a song-making age. The whole argument is based on a view of ethnology which American students have definitely discarded, namely, on the idea of a primitive simplicity, freedom, and direct contact with nature. Exactly the reverse is the usual method of present-day conception; as we recede in time and in the order of culture, formality, habit, rigid custom, precise ritual, appear to prevail. Go back as far as we may, we never arrive at origins, or at simple and natural opinions; we find only artificial and complicated systems of belief and worship, built on the ruins of other antecedent systems, extending farther than the eye can reach.

Theories of origin, whether of language or thought, are to be viewed with suspicion; the ethnologist and folk-lorist, confident that philosophical speculation can never enlighten his subject, but is certain to obscure and distort it, will keep himself as far as possible from any speculations which transgress the field of actual experience. If the facts are not adequate for a secure conclusion he will seek to enlarge the field of knowledge, knowing that disagreements of theory arise only from the existence of chasms in the record.

The evidence by which the opinion in question is sustained may be sought either in the field of European and Asiatic folk-lore, that is to say among races in a state of civilization, or among lower tribes. In both fields there is a good deal of room for more accurate information; and it is on this account, rather than with intent to examine a philosophical hypothesis, that I venture to add a few remarks.

In regard to English folk-verse, it is particularly the ballads, as songs performed in the dance, to which attention is called. In regard to these it is admitted that from existing material the doctrine of spontaneity obtains small support. Study of ballads leads to results exactly corresponding to those above formulated for folk-tales; ballads also are generally international and European; as we are required to assign each composition ultimately to some particular land, so, by a parity of evidence, we are referred to one composer as author of words and melody. Not that ballads did not continue at all times to be composed; these came into existence in all countries and periods; but, as the existing stock was adequate, new productions seldom found a degree of popular assent sufficient to establish them as traditional.

In the case of one ballad, and that an American one, of relatively late authorship, it has been possible to trace the song to its source; a written and highly literary production of the late eighteenth century, belonging to a town in western Massachusetts, passed into familiar oral use, developed numerous variants, oral and written, and took on a crude love history; in the course of transmission, according to the universal law, the peculiar qualities of the original poem were eliminated.¹ As has been the case with European ballads in general, this chant obtained uses not originally intended, and passed into a nursery lullaby. One fact is worth a thousand speculations; it is easy to understand how, in an earlier period of history, a song of this sort might have crossed the seas and become international; no doubt, among the stock of European ballads, many may have originated from the circumstances of a particular event.

Whatever opinions respecting the origins of dramatic songs be adopted, — and these can scarcely be reducible to any one theory, seeing that the evolution would differ for each separate case, — allowance must be made for that habit of poetical composition which seems in all races and at all times to have been a general human possession. From a period long before the daughters of Israel sang before Saul, every occasion in tribal or national life would have been expressed in verse and danced in ballad; every individual characteristic would have given opportunity for malicious wit, and every important personage be exposed to lampoons, which would have even been more dreaded than in our day is the caricature of the comic artist. Out of this perpetually replenished mass of song, for the most part dying in the hour of its birth, here and there a particular phrase or melody would attract attention, be remembered, become subject to traditional recollection with its attendant variation, and eventually, after the manner described, abdicate separate peculiarities, assume the conventional type, and become part of the common stock of poetry. If in this process, either at the birth of the song or in the course of its life history, there were a collaboration of several intelligences, and so a composite authorship, it would be no more than now takes place in a theatrical composition, which in its several rehearsals undergoes alteration in conformity with the suggestions of actors and managers. In the whole process there seems to be no more difficulty and mystery than belongs to all literary creation, in its nature always more or less mysterious, and nothing which requires the assumption of any psychological laws or mental processes differing from those daily familiar.

As regards lyrical song, English folk-verse is singularly wanting, a deficiency perhaps owing more to the lack of record than to origi-

¹ *Early American Ballads*, vol. xiii, p. 107 ff.

nal inferiority. The frequent beauty of the initial verses which Burns has borrowed from the Scottish folk-song of his day, and of which he has made literary use, leads us to regret the failure of anything like a representative gathering. So also Shakespeare employs and transforms the English lyric song of his own time, and shows the attraction and fresh poetical character which it must in many cases have possessed.

Among the many types of popular verse is to be mentioned one very familiar on the continent of Europe, but almost unknown in English record, namely, brief and separate stanzas of a lyric quality. In German and Scandinavian regions the predominant form is the quatrain; the lines exhibit a sentimental quality, or else are satirical; present is a conscious feeling for nature, which the ballad proper shows chiefly in the refrain. In the Latin languages the variety of such verse is far greater; distichs, terzets, quatrains, stanzas of six and eight lines are represented, often with complicated metrical and rhythmical arrangements. The poetry generally shows a highly literary and elaborate character; as in the case of the German quatrains, the relation of this popular verse to cultivated poetry presents difficult and unsolved problems.¹

Frequently stanzas of this sort are used for social purposes. Either in the open air or in the chamber, one singer will contend against another. In these contests the victory will belong to him who can with the greatest ease and abundance continue to offer problems which his antagonist must solve. The offering and guessing of rhymed riddles is one of the most common forms of such rivalries. These competitions are nothing new, being older than the time of Virgil and indeed of Samson. Yet it does not follow that the popular verses of this sort have come down from remote antiquity in their original form and unaffected by the influence of literature. Rather, proper theory would indicate that while a material may be world-old in essence and may from the remotest times have been universally familiar, yet the form in which that matter is presented undergoes continual variation, and that, according to the rule above

¹ Called *schüaderhupfl* in the Austrian highlands, *stev* in Norway, etc. See Gummere, p. 405 ff., and his references.

It is a pity that Professor Gummere's discussion of all this material is so obscured by the hypothesis that his mention is scarce useful for descriptive purposes. That the amœbean chant and Fescennine contest in mirth and satire existed in Italy and elsewhere from the most remote times, and that the modern usages may be considered as connected, is obvious; but that any recession in date carries us any nearer to the time of spontaneity and concurrence, demanded by the thesis, does not appear. On the contrary, the allusions most remote in the order of time seem to me rather indicative of the opposite principle, namely, the resemblance of poetic methods in the past to those in the present.

offered, waves of influence in perpetual series descend through the social scale, and continually remodel the traditional verse into types answering to those which have been developed by literary invention.

In encounters of this sort, invention would of course be allowed, and the onlooker would probably be impressed with the idea that the entire product was extemporaneous. Yet examination and collection proves that this is not so. The stanzas or staves in question, for the most part, form an inherited treasure; they are common to many districts, have wandered and varied, and are not generally to be referred to the particular locality in which they have been discovered; as before observed with regard to ballads, each separate stanza also must originally have come from one mind in one place. The reciters, who in this social game compete with one another, have their memory stored with a fund of traditional verses. The contest, in short, answers very much to that capping of verses which when I was a boy formed a favorite amusement; the distinction being, that the youth in case of difficulty was not expected to rely on his invention, while the popular singer, if quick enough, might extricate himself by an effort of ingenuity.

Extemporaneous composition of verse forms a social exercise still in some degree indulged in; it is not an uncommon pastime to assign each person of a company a pencil and a theme, and to amuse the audience by the subsequent reading aloud of such lucubrations. Neither is the practice as common, nor the results as striking as they were in the time of Matthew Prior, of whom it is said: "In a French company, when every one sang a little song or stanza, of which the burden was given — *Bannissons la melancholie*, — when it came to his turn to sing, after the performance of a young lady, he produced these extemporary and elegant lines:—

Mais cette voix, et ces beaux yeux
Font Cupidon trop dangereux,
Et je suis triste quand je crie
Bannissons la melancholie."

The example proves the more intellectual character of such games in the past, when, instead of "I love my love with an A," or the children's sport in which the catcher of a thrown handkerchief is required to name a certain animal, until the list is exhausted and forfeit must be paid, the person selected was expected to produce a song on the spot. The abandonment of such demands is only a result of the specialization of functions, and consequent raising of the standard of excellence to a degree which makes only professionals incline to perform; yet in music, the habit of extemporaneous composition continues, and probably the relation of the free part of the performance to the themes and suggestions which the extemporizer derives

from his memory may serve to represent the degree of originality which the extemporizing poet of earlier generations might expect to attain.

In the case of games of children, extemporization has had a share. A pretty example is found in the duet : —

I'll give to you a paper of pins,
And that 's the way my love begins,
If you will marry me.

The antagonist replies with a refusal : —

I don't accept your paper of pins, etc.

In this play, after the remembered verses have been exhausted, additional offers may be made up at pleasure : as the little reciter said, improvising at the moment, and without hesitation : —

I'll give to you a dress of black,
A green silk apron and a white hat,
If you will marry me.

In spite of this flight of imagination, the song in which these verses are included is of very ancient origin, being a branch of the English marriage game, in itself doubtless originally ritual, and, like most other English game-songs, international. In this case the improvised element was certainly not the original motive ; and it seems to me likely that this instance represents a pretty general relation.¹

The conclusion of these inadequate remarks seems to be, that neither in respect of spontaneity nor concurrence did the past present any striking psychological differences from the present ; the alleged collective or "communal" character of folk-song, its simplicity and universality, are sufficiently explained by its oral medium, and by the relatively simple life of antiquity as compared with the more differentiated present.

¹ In his discussion, Professor Gummere (p. 284) passes over the song-games of children. This is a pity, seeing that these afford the best opportunity of testing his doctrine. The existing material does not favor his hypothesis ; indeed, observation of children at play seems to show that coöperative and extemporaneous composition of games offers no psychological methods differing from those involved in the continual creation of speech, or the process of invention with older folk. See my *Games and Songs of American Children*, 2d ed., Introduction.

A case in which extemporization is more frequent is supplied by "Sailors' Chanties," treated by Mr. Hutchison in the following article. Here also the same "chantie" usually exists in many versions ; the theme frequently involves reference to the fixed literary stock ; the improvised element appears to be secondary. It may, however, be conceded that this very quality, the free, though often small addition which each reciter makes, gives to a folk-tale or folk-song that simplicity, freedom, and absence of self-consciousness which constitute much of its attraction.

In regard to native American peoples, the same questions arise. In many cases, these have impressed observers with the idea that all the tribal song is extemporized. Is not this opinion the consequence of imperfect record? Does there not exist, or has there not existed, in each case, a body of ancient and perhaps ceremonial poetry? Even if the stock of verse does not now possess a fixed and ritual character, will it not be found, as in the case of the German quatrains, to be more or less inherited? How wide are the limits of originality on the part of the extemporizing composer?

To these questions correspond others relating to the theory of song itself. Are there insensible limits, by which the chant of the tale, in exciting passages, passes over into a form of verse? In aboriginal American verse what are the rhythmical laws? Are the refrains by which dramatic song may be accompanied limited in number, and, as often in the European ballad, suitable for many chants, or is each refrain only for one composition? Is the refrain always the response of the company to the chant of one singer? These are interrogatories which could be indefinitely extended, but may be sufficient to suggest to the inquirer that there is still opportunity to make important contributions to knowledge.

To return to the general question, the difference between folk-song, as collective, and written verse, as individual. The extent to which this distinction is real has been examined, and I see no need to add a qualification. The whole matter seems to amount to this, that the habit of writing has permitted the writer to fix permanently his own ideas and peculiarities. Before writing was used, a similar result was attained by groups of literati, who could trust to the memory of friends or pupils. So again, one can hardly say that the folk-song is more collective than are modern newspapers avowedly edited by their readers. Thus between folk-lore and literature exist intermediate territories.

If it be asked, whether the distinction of collective and individual thought can serve as a clue to the history of literature, in the sense that the former was the original mental state, the latter the final result reached only in modern time, I should, for my own part, reject the proposition. There never was a time, since mankind emerged from the brute condition, in which literary invention and expression was not as individual as it is to-day. There never was a time when the prophet and poet did not seek his inspiration in solitude just as he does to-day. The question whether early or present man is the more social, makes one of those philosophic theses which can be answered with equal correctness in favor of either alternative.¹ Literature, in

¹ In the *Beginnings of Poetry*, p. 141, we read: "As the individual frees himself from the clogs of his mediæval guild, in literature as in life, there begins the

any time and place, is part of human life in that period and locality ; its history represents continually differentiating and developing experience. Oral literature, contiguous to written literature, makes part of the human realm, but is subject to no special and distinct psychologic principles.

Relations between extemporaneous and traditional verse correspond to those discernible between conversation and literature. Over against the free form of expression there has always existed a determinate form, by which the former is affected. We gain nothing, as it seems to me, by assuming an imaginary primal stage in which one is supposed to have been the product of the other.

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distinctly modern idea of fame, of glory, as a personal achievement apart from community or state ; and there, too, begins the idea of literary property." It seems to me, however, that during the Middle Age, and in antiquity, writers signed their names about to the same extent as do moderns. The excuse for Nyrop's strange statement may be, that authors who depended on oral record had no opportunity for signature. As to property in verse, we have a striking American Indian example in the well-known custom according to which a shaman alone can use the songs which he has bought, and which he will sell. No doubt the ancient or mediæval poet was usually dependent on the bounty of a patron to whom he usually left the reward (taking care that his song should extol the merits of liberality). Sometimes, however, he fixed his own valuation. In the Irish *Acallamh na senórach* (Colloquy of the elders), we read of a prince of Leinster who died of shame because he could not pay cash to a panegyrist, who in consequence threatened a lampoon. In a poem of Li Tae Po (eighth century) we hear of a Chinese lady who pays gold for love verses.